Browning Society to Restore Poets' Florentine Home

BEFORE the war there met weekly in a Florentine salon a small coterie of British and American ladies, the Americans predominating, for the purpose of reading and commentating the poems and dramas of Robert and Elizabeth Browning. It was a small but very earnest gathering, where the Browning cult was practiced with boundless fervor and sincerity, not as a matter of fashion but of worship with sincere and fervent admiration at the shrine of the two poets whose memories could be evoked above all in Florence, the frame of melodious reality. These Borwning worshipers endeavored with the intellect of love, as Dante would express it, to illuminate these obscurities, following in the footsteps of the various Browning societies that exist in America.

Florence, more than any other city, has memories of Robert and Elizabeth Browning in their art and their life. It was in Florence that the two poets passed the happiest and most fruitful years of their poetic union. In Florence their rare love and their poetic fertility came to full fruition, absorbing from the Italic atmosphere its grand poetic traditions, besides watching with ardent enthusiasm the birth pangs of the third Italy. In every church, before every famous picture, the couple passed hours of reverent study. Their path can be traced in many of the Florentine streets. In Piazza Pitti they basked in the hot Italian sun. Their own house, but a few steps further on, was that Casa Guidi immortalized in Elizabeth's verse. Here they kept open house to the many birds of passage who then as now annually pass through the Tuscan city.

With the advent of the world war the meetings of the little Browning Society were reluctantly abandoned; some of the frequenters remained and gave their services to war relief. The Brownings had taught them to look on Italy not as merely a cemetery of beauty, crowded with historic memories, but as a living organism whose pulse had never ceased to beat. It was in truth the Brownings who had engraved the name of Italy in their hearts and made them understand and believe in Italy's renewed and grander destinies.

But now that the cyclone of war has passed the little Browning Society is reconstituting itself and proposes to give a visible and permanent homage to the memory of the Brownings. The famous Casa Guidi that housed the two poets bears over its portal an affectionate inscription that speaks of the golden ring forged by Elizabeth Browning's verses between Italy and England. Tenants have come and gone who knew not nor cared for the atmosphere in which they happened to live. The Browning apartment was inhabited by people who never read a line of their writings. Now the little Browning Society is collecting the needful funds to buy Casa Guidi and to constitute the poets' apartment into an oratory for their worship.

It is intended to restore the flat as it was when the poets lived there, and the society is seeking some of the furniture, pictures and other objects which were in it at the time. Other objects they are having carefully copied, as far as the originals are known. Descriptions of this interior abound, but the objects themselves may not be easy to trace, as after the son's death a rapacious and inimical relative on the Barrett side, who still nursed the elder Barrett's dislike of the marriage, took away the records. But it may be possible to buy back some of these from those who acquired them at the sale at Christie's.

It is further proposed, and this is an easier task, to buy a complete collection not only of the various editions of the Brownings' works but of everything directly or remotely concerned with them—all biographies. commentaries and the like—dealing with them or their famous friends and contemporaries. The poets' only son had in part accomplished this task, as he had bought Casa Guidi and intended to turn it into a museum dedicated to his parents' memory, but his death, leaving no will, frustrated this pious design.

It will not be difficult to reconstruct the apartment in which the pair lived so happily, for very accurate descriptions have been left by visitors of the time. It appears that in the anteroom was the piano on which Browning loved to play, for he was a skilled as well as a learned musician. Here hung some of those "old pictures in Florence" which they had unearthed from the antique shops they loved to frequent, and were not fakes but true originals which in those days could still be picked up for the traditional song. In the dining room, hung with heavy red damask which the poet afterward transferred to his London home, were appended medallion portraits of Tennyson, Carlyle and of Robert Browning himself.

The poet's own study was long and narrow, adorned with busts and masks, among them the death mask of Keats. The study-sitting room of Elizabeth, that looked on Piazza St. Felice, with its tapestries, its heavy inlaid bookcases, its old pictures of sacred themes, its big green sofa and equally ample armchair—the one in which her husband depicts her as sitting in his poem—its large gilded mirrors, conveyed the impression of one of those museum rooms furnished by lovers of the antique in which are combined the search after the picturesque and the exotic with a certain good taste. On the little terrace overlooking the side street camelias and miniature orange trees bloomed in their season.

Just Like Alice in Wonderland

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Drawn by G. E. Studdy.

WHEN my mistress found me like this she said I reminded her of Alice in Wonderland. I don't know who Alice is unless it's the little girl who lives next door and I don't think she ever was in Wonderland because I never see her any place but in the back yard jumping over a rope which she tries to hold over her head, but which always gets under her feet. And, anyhow, I don't look like a girl and I wish mistress wouldn't say such things—they make me sick. All I did to-day was to get in this old box, where there was a piece of funny cloth that I could see through and a lot of women's stockings and things. I put the cloth on my head and mistress said it was her wedding veil. I wonder what's a wedding. Anyhow if I have one I know where the veil is. I'll tell you what my plans are about this next Sunday.

How Bernhardt Played a Trick on Mrs. Campbell

Continued From Page Nine.

is still in the eighteenth century. He would have done just as well with Miss R— S—, as you could have done just as well with Mr. A— S—; the intervals with the entr'acte music played sixteen times over killed the play. People know that it is not Shakespeare who is the bore, and that B— or B— A— could have made a success of it with principals at £15 a week.

As it happened, when I saw it, you made only a few blunders:

1. You should not have played the dagger scene in that best evening dress of Lady M., but in a black wrap, like a thunder cloud, with a white face.

2. You should not have repeated the exit business by which Macbeth conveyed that he was going to see a ghost on every step of the stairs up to Duncan. You should have gone straight off like a woman of iron.

3. You should not have forgotten that there was blood on your hand and on his, and that you dared not touch one another for fear of messing your clothes with gore.

4. In the sleep-walking scene you should not have rubbed your hands realistically (drat the blood, it won't come off), nor worn an idiotic confection that wound your feet up more and more at every step and finally pitched you—off the stage—on your head. That scene needs the whole cavernous depth of the stage and the draperies of a ghost. It was maddening to hear you deliver the lines splendidly and be in a different class to all the others and then throw it all away by half a dozen stupidities that the call boy could have corrected. . . . G. B. S.

As a matter of fact, I was out of gear with Mr. Hackett's method, and by his side my performance was very ineffective.

But I must not jump the years like this.

Of the Lyceum performance I quote Mr. A. B. Walkley's criticism: "Mrs. Campbell's Lady Macbeth is also novel and interesting, but it is also something more, and something very important—it is a perfectly possible and plausible interpretation of the character. . . . There are reasons a priori why Mrs. Campbell should find no particular difficulty, 'modern' though she be, with the part of Lady Macbeth. Where her modernity comes in is in the substitution of mysterious sensuous charm for the conventional domineering of a virago. I have tried to sum up this type in the words 'Baudelairean.' I see that my friend, the theatrical critic of the *Leader*, calls it an Aubrey Beardsley type, which is another way of putting exactly the same thing. The woman clings and kisses and casts a spell, she magnetizes her Thane. When words fail she rests her two hands on his shoulders, almost winds herself round him, looks him straight in the eyes with a strange smile, and the poor man melts like wax. It is the 'Baudelaire' enchantress, the 'femme serpent,' and, as I have already said, it delights me — partly because, like every other man in the audience, I cannot but feel something of the fascination that overcomes Macbeth, partly because it appeals to me as true, for Macbeth was molded by his wife, not merely by the influence of a strong will over a faltering will but by the witchery of woman over man."

Actors and actresses possess a very wonderful honesty in their endeavor to please the author.

They would rather brave the censure of critics, the disappointment of dearest friends, than feel the author was dissatisfied with their work.

There is a story of an author who at rehearsal, when the actor fell, said: "No, no, that's not the fall I want at all, I want you to fall—inert." The actor said: "Would you mind showing me?"

The brave author got up, and threw himself down—hurting himself very much and the actor said: "That's splendid; would you mind doing it again?"

The loveliest performance I ever saw was Ellen Terry as *Imogen*.

When she entered I felt she had come from the moon; when she left the stage I was sure the stars were greeting her.

No one has ever had her magical step —that extraordinary happy haste, that made you feel she must presently arrive at the gates of Paradise.

The evening I saw her as *Imogen* she forgot her words, and—giving a delicious look at the audience and then toward heaven—spoke three times in a voice that melted your bosom, this word: "Beyond —beyond—beyond——"

There was no "Beyond" in the text, but it was the loveliest word I ever heard, and described her *Imogen*.

I saw the great Eleanora Duse only in modern plays—"Magda," "Hedda Gabler" and "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray."

To me she was too sad and too slow. But in her work there was a great dignity, sincerity, and a fine introspection—and a tremendous appreciation of the nobility of suffering.

I wish I had seen her in a poetical play —or in a purely romantic, decorative role.

Her personality was not new to me, for she resembled strangely an Italian aunt of mine.

Sympatica morbidezza was her great charm, and she commanded almost slavish attention and admiration from her audience.

Though perhaps not aiming at quite such a classic standard, I think there are just as many clever actresses to-day as there were yesterday.

The "school" to-day is lighter—the personalities have somehow adapted themselves to a more girlish, or what is termed a "flapper," style.

We were neurotic, weary ladies in teagowns, when Ibsen gripped us.

To-day is the day of the girls the soldier boys left behind them, and rightly so.

That will pass, and to-morrow the woman who "comes through with a smile" may be asked for——

Anyway, surely the enthusiasm for the theater is greater than ever.

I have never known the "art of acting" really cared for in this country. It is first the player, then the play—and always, "Who is your favorite actor or actress?"

I do not find people discussing exquisite gesture—variety of tone—and above all, that most difficult of technical difficulties, the subtle tones, tempo and manner, which indicate the difference of feeling toward each character in the play—or broad human effects—atmosphere, breeding and style.

Now and then a critic points out these things, but an English audience does not look for them—or recognize them.

When authors produce plays, it seems to me, the absorbing idea is that their words are heard by the audience.

I have known it carried to such a point that the actors talked *at* the audience the whole evening, making one feel not only a fool, but a deaf fool.

It is a fault to drop the voice now and again, but it is a worse fault to bawl for two and a half hours unceasingly.

When actor-managers produce plays—it is that the play should "go"; the thrilling scenes thrill; the comedy lines call forth laughter; and the tender scenes tears—and they themselves make a personal success.

But the real "art of acting" is not considered.

This art has nothing to do with impersonation—beyond the *means* by which the artist impersonates.

It has nothing to do with youth—unless the feeling of youth is to be suggested.

It has nothing to do with any *real thing*—only with the technical means, apart from inspiration, by which the *real thing* is given to the imagination of the audience.

There is a certain artistic hysteria on the stage, that is exasperating—a stare in the artist's eye as he waits at the wings, a stiffening of his muscles and a throatiness ready in his voice. Oh, that he would trip, or sneeze, and suddenly become natural and begin over again—the right way!

Science Explains Mystery of "Spontaneous Combustion"

MANY of the mysteries of "spontaneous combustion" have been cleared up by the advance of science. There was a time when the fact that a heap of coal can take fire of its own accord, so to speak, was regarded as almost miraculous.

After many serious accidents of this kind had occurred, involving not infrequently the loss of vessels at sea, an explanation was suggested to the effect that the fire was caused by the oxidation of the pyrites of iron and sulphur, which are often found in coal, and which are popularly called in England "coal brasses." When the pyrites are exposed to moisture a rapid chemical change occurs in them, accompanied by the production of heat. But it was afterward shown that many coals liable to spontaneous ignition when collected in immense heaps possessed such slight traces of pyrites that their presence could not be regarded as the cause of the ignition.

A more careful study of the phenomenon, based upon a consideration of the nature and structure of the coal itself, led to the theory which prevails to-day. This is that the oxidation of the coal, and not of the pyrites, is the real source of the disastrous fires which occasionally break out in the holds of ships laden with coal and in the vast heaps contained in coal yards.

Coal possesses a surprising power of absorbing oxygen. Some kinds of coal will rapidly absorb two or three times their own volume of oxygen when exposed to the air. Bituminous coals in particular always contain a considerable amount of hydrogen, forming a volatile compound with the carbon.

When oxygen is absorbed from the air it begins to combine with both the carbon and the hydrogen, and this chemical action produces heat. The heat in turn quickens the chemical action, and if, in addition, the coal in which this action is going on is heaped together in a large mass, the heat quickly accumulates because it cannot readily escape, coal being a slow and poor conductor.

The smaller the pieces of coal the greater the danger, because a small piece has in proportion to its mass a larger surface area exposed to the air, and consequently to the absorption of oxygen, than a large piece; and when small pieces are heaped together they form a porous mass which may be thoroughly permeated by oxygen from the atmosphere.

The presence of moisture also accelerates the chemical action of the oxygen in the coal so that the temperature of wet coal rises faster than that of dry coal. In the process of loading ships with coal a serious danger is often invited by pouring the coal into the hold from a considerable height by means of chutes. The coal at the bottom thus gets broken smaller and smaller, until it is in a fit state for combustion to be set up.

No doubt the mysterious loss of many ships is to be explained by a spontaneous ignition of the coal that they carried.

IN order that they may be capable of coping with the heaviest kind of work, electric tools are generally provided with powerful motors. As long as the work is satisfactory no trouble is experienced; but once the bit or drill sticks or binds the powerful motor immediately causes the entire tool to revolve with sometimes serious injury to the user.

To overcome this danger a safety brake has been introduced. This brake is composed of a special switch and connections, including a small resistance. Its purpose is to shut off automatically the current and at the same time throw in the resistance in order that there may be caused a powerful magnetic braking effect.

When, for any reason, the operator's hand is removed from the handle the brake stops the revolving tool in less than one revolution, thus rendering it harmless. The tool cannot become unmanageable, as immediately upon the release of the switch, either by the operator letting it go or the handle being jerked out of his hands, the device shuts off the current and stops the tool.

Paris May Soon Set Men's Fashions

Staff Correspondent of THE NEW YORK HERALD.

Paris, May 27.

FOR the first time since the wars with Napoleon European men are taking their dress fashions from Paris just as their women always have done. London clothes will still be popular, but London tailors will have to pay attention to the clothes fashioned in gay Paree. Royalties are setting the example and it is possible Americans will eventually follow suit.

The reappearance of the frock coak at the marriage of Princess Mary was said to be "official," but when the lucky bridegroom, Viscount Lascelles, reached Paris with his royal wife he gave Londoners a shock. At a glorified reception he appeared in a cutaway suit of a delicate gray color, such as only Paris men's tailors would know how to use. It was cut also in the graceful, artistic lines which the English have always affected to despise.

For some time both the King of Spain and the King of Rumania have been buying their clothes in Paris. So has that thoroughly Europeanized Maharajah of Kapurthala, whose dress and equipage have been the delight of the fashionable world in the swellest resorts of Europe for many years. The heir to the Persian crown, who is as well known in French watering places as the exquisitely groomed Shah himself, is a close second.

One of the oldest "English" houses of Paris, which has flourished under the name of the original Cumberland for more than half a century, acknowledges that "foreign men are buying enormously in Paris, although Parisian men themselves are not buying so much, because clothes are so very costly for them." Thirty years ago this house was already dressing William K. Vanderbilt and the King Alfonso of Spain of that time, the father of his present majesty.

Among the foreign men who are in the forefront of this movement are those of Holland and of the Argentine Republic. Where else than in Paris could a man get an ash gray cutaway suit with fancy trousers? And the overcoat to go with it—something needed every hour this inclement year—would be in some light color to match. Then, to cover one's evening dress, the rich, ample cape, with collar that can be turned up and wide lapels of silk, is coming in, or an equally ample cover coat with long, wide sleeves adorned in the same fashion. The only objection is that the theater cloak rooms are apt to fold them out of shape—but they certainly make a good figure of a man.

Englishmen and Americans have in the past objected to the French cut of men's clothes even more than they have to the fancy colors. Tailors say the English cut to the measure of the man's body, which was Beau Brummel's rule. Americans often say that English tailors do not fit a man's body close enough. The English retort that Americans try to improve a man's real shape by playing up the waist when his hips are too broad, or padding deficient shoulders. Both object to French tailors in that they begin by cutting the material to fit loose and then trimming down at successive try ons.

For the outsider who only looks at the finished result when the man is dressed in his new colthes the present difference seems to be this: The French give a man a long waist sloping out below, even in a sack coat. In the cutaway and evening suits they study graceful, falling lines and outlines much as they do in ladies' dresses. English tailors do not seem to have the eye for that and, no doubt, condemn it as theatrical.

John Wesley said he did not see why the devil should have all the good tunes, and so it is hard that women should have all the grace and harmony in clothes. It was not so when Henry of Navarre wore a plume in his hat and a silk coat of many colors with slashed sleeves and laces. If the French succeed in dressing men we may yet see their artistic qualities in clothes worn in New York and even in London. For mere fit American taste is more like that of the French, who find, however, that American clothes are a little standardized, that is, too much alike without enough attention to the individual's personality. But this too is art.

OWING to the property which aluminum possesses of producing a very high temperature when burned with substances that give off oxygen it has been employed for making a detonator for firing explosives which do not readily respond to the action of the detonating compositions generally used.

The aluminum is used in the form of a powder mixed with the other substances filling the percussion caps or detonators. The sudden high temperature induced by the pulverized aluminum results in a greater mechanical energy than can be produced with compositions not containing aluminum.